

H

ow Canada Delivered the Games to the World

More than two billion viewers around the world watched Canada present the biggest and busiest Winter Games in Olympic history. They saw records fall and excitement soar. They watched graceful figure skaters leap and spin across the same ice surface which, only hours earlier, shook to the crunching collisions of international hockey at its finest. And, thanks to new and innovative audio techniques, they heard the panting and gasps of athletes, the edge of a ski biting into crusted snow, and the blade of a skate gouging into rock-hard ice. Never before had fans the world over been better able to *feel* the drama.

Ralph Mellanby, executive producer of the Canadian Television Network Host Broadcaster (CTV HB) explains: "Delivering the Games to the world was the Olympic organizing committee's biggest responsibility."

To that end, the organizing committee — Olympiques Calgary Olympics (OCO) — bestowed on CTV for \$55 million (Cdn) the rights to be host broadcaster. Radio rights went to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) for \$50 000 and involved more than 280 hours of coverage.

CTV HB took nearly four years to prepare for the Calgary Olympics. It started with a big, barn-like curling rink five-minutes' drive from the heart of the city, and turned it into a state-of-the-art International Broadcasting Centre. To it, CTV HB added a new pavilion which housed

a reception centre, the communications headquarters for radio and TV crews, and security operations.

CTV HB's broadcasting strategy linked mobile units and commentators at venues to TV crews in the broadcasting centre. By cable and microwave, events were fed to satellites and then broadcast worldwide. Foreign networks could accept uninterrupted coverage or select specific events by booking time on satellite dishes.

Roone Arledge, group president of ABC News and Sports, which paid a record \$309 million (Cdn) for U.S. television rights, called the CTV HB crews "the finest I've ever worked with."

Altogether, TV crews, both Canadian and foreign, provided 550 hours' pool coverage of 14 events to some 50 countries, whose own broadcasters then provided their own live commentaries, interviews and other feature items in 18 languages. To do the job, 22 mobile units were assigned to the various venues, so that for the first time ever, none had to be moved from site to site. Nearly 300 colour cameras captured the action from the alpine skiing events at Nakiska on Mt. Allan, to the nordic competition at nearby Canmore, to the races on the world's largest speed-skating oval in Calgary, to the hockey and figure skating events at the famed Saddledome. Broadcasters and their staffs outnumbered the athletes two to one.

CTV was determined that viewers be given an unprecedented opportunity to hear the action as well as see it from all possible angles. The network installed tiny cameras and microphones in the hockey goal nets, along the walls of the speed-skating oval and along the downhill ski run.

CTV HB's high-tech armoury included the world's longest television lens — with a 60-times magnification power — which zoomed in on downhill skiers from over 2 km away. Opening and closing ceremonies were televised with 360-degree shots from a movable camera hung at centre field in Calgary's McMahon Stadium.

The intricate logistics for the XV Olympic Winter Games were originally mapped out by Marius Morais, CTV's former executive director of engineering and technical operations. Morais, whose experience included coverage of Expo 67 and the 1976 Summer Olympics — both held in Montreal, Canada — died suddenly in November 1987. "It was his plan . . .

he had it all ready for us," said Mellanby, three-time Emmy award winner and executive producer of "Hockey Night in Canada" for 18 years. "These Games were a monument to him."

By now, the spiralling networks of wire have been stripped from the broadcasting centre. Gone are the banks of elaborate computers. And so too are the rooftop satellite dishes which simultaneously transmitted eight TV signals and up to 180 commentaries. By the Games' end, more than 2 000 hours of programming had been transmitted globally via satellite.

Yet the silence is not total. Like the roll of a distant drum, a soft rumble echoes off the drab concrete walls — granite rocks skittering along a shimmering alley of ice. The curlers are back.

This satellite "dish farm" transmitted Olympic excitement to over two billion viewers around the globe.

